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Discourse as driver of innovation in contemporary haute cuisine: The case of elBulli restaurant

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Abstract

This paper examines the case of elBulli restaurant, an organization central to the avant-garde movement that has revolutionized haute cuisine, to analyze an organization's ability to innovate and to enact changes within its field. The paper draws on ethnographic data to describe the role of one key driver of innovation: the systematic documentation and publishing of a discourse, prior to the mass use of social media. Three functions of a discourse that lead to the diffusion and institutionalization of innovations in the case under study are identified: (i) conceptualization, (ii) socialization and (iii) control. The analysis points to the potential contribution of discourse as a driver in other industries following creative paths. © 2013 AZTI-Tecnalia. Production and hosting by Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Culinary innovation; Case study; Discourse; Haute cuisine

Cuisine is a language that everyone speaks and understands. (Ferran Adrià, elBulli restaurant chef and co-owner, talks at Google company headquarters, USA, 2011).

Introduction

One of the most radical revolutions in the culinary industry has occurred in the last two decades. The knowledge and practices promoted by the avant-garde movement – commonly called “progressive cuisine”, “techno–emotional cuisine”, “molecular cuisine” or even “Modernist” cuisine – have led

to a profound questioning of what a restaurant is, what cooking is, and what it means to be a cook. This enterprise has resulted in the emergence of radical innovations that challenge the very foundations of knowledge that have long supported high-end cuisine. The impact of this effort is such that it has transcended the boundaries of the gastronomic field, stimulating interrogations in other forms of organizations, professions and industries.

This paper examines the case of an organization of central importance in the gastronomic avant-garde: elBulli restaurant. Drawing on ethnographic data, I describe how discourse – understood as written texts and documentations – was developed and managed by this iconic organization to disseminate its innovations way beyond the restaurant's local environment and, in so doing, enact changes in the gastronomic field at large.

elBulli is best known as a three-star *Michelin* restaurant² located in the province of Girona, Catalonia, Spain, which first opened in 1963. For an unprecedented five times *Restaurant Magazine* declared elBulli the “best restaurant in the world.”³

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²The Michelin guide is the most renowned and influential guide in the European restaurant industry. This guide rates restaurants according to their culinary achievements. Three stars is the highest award that a restaurant can receive. Only a few restaurants in the world receive this award.

³In the years 2002, 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009. In 2010 elBulli was nominated as the world's 2nd best restaurant in the San Pellegrino list. This

So strong was its presence that several distinguished chefs now in the top of culinary rankings have worked in elBulli's kitchen.⁴ From 2008 until it closed on July 30th, 2011, elBulli restaurant received some 2 million requests for reservations and only 8000 diners sampled the 35-course prix fixe meal offered at the restaurant (Adrià et al., 2008). Working at elBulli was even more difficult than dining there: every season, of 3000 highly-trained cooks from all over the world who applied to get a slot as a “stagiaire” (apprentice/intern), elBulli accepted 32 (Abend, 2011, 13). The short schedule of elBulli exacerbated these difficulties of access. The restaurant was open only half the year so as to dedicate half the year to experimentation and creativity. Access is now cut off entirely. In 2011, Ferran Adrià, the restaurant's chef and co-owner, announced the closing of elBulli restaurant for a period of 2 years, to reopen as a nonprofit research center of creativity under the name of “elBulli Foundation”. Adrià's quest for a creative culinary style and the main processes and triggering mechanisms that led to elBulli restaurant's development has been carefully examined by Svejenova et al. (2010).

Using the case of elBulli restaurant, I turn our attention to a driver of innovation that remains underexplored in contemporary studies of haute cuisine: the formalization and diffusion of a discourse. I argue that the transformations that have occurred in the high-end restaurant industry in the last decade can not only illuminate our knowledge of new foods or preparations of foods but also, and still more significantly, deepen our understanding of how innovation can be mobilized within an institutional context. My empirical case centers on innovation as conceived and executed by elBulli restaurant, which especially sheds light on the role that a discourse plays in encouraging transformations in haute cuisine, at a time when social media and Smartphones were not yet prevalent in the gastronomic landscape.

Theoretical framework

Many definitions of the term innovation have been proposed in academic literature. Most useful for the purposes of this analysis is a definition offered by the organizational scholar Andrew H. Van de Ven who describes innovation as: “the development and implementation of new ideas by people who over time engage in transactions with others within an institutional context” (Van de Ven, 1986, p. 591). I suggest that this conceptualization is important, as it emphasizes two aspects that are critical for understanding culinary innovations: first,

innovation is regarded as a process that is produced in practice by participants of a given field; and second, innovation is defined as contextually situated, that is, as novel ideas that are enacted within a particular domain. This limitation is enlightening for the case under study since it implies that the innovations – and their impact – encouraged by elBulli restaurant must be interpreted and assessed within the relevant context of high-end cuisine. I will elaborate by drawing on the work of the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. When talking about the cultural production of artistic work, Bourdieu (1983) pointed out that works of art exist as symbolic objects only if they are accessible and recognized by a given audience. Building on this line of argumentation, I propose that similarly to a work of art, culinary innovations exist only if other participants in the gastronomic field can recognize them as such.

But what are the mediating factors that encourage the diffusion, recognition and institutionalization of culinary innovations? Sociological studies have highlighted the role of different factors involved in the “construction of taste” in the gastronomic field. Taken to the realm of innovation research, we can say that these factors that mediate taste also drive innovation in haute cuisine. At a macro-level, sociologists have pointed out the effects of social and cultural forces in shaping judgments of tastes and food (Mennell, 1985). Recent studies also stress the significance of political tensions in determining the salience of particular foods and industries at a national level (De Soucey, 2010). Another line of analysis highlights the role of institutions – in particular of gastronomic guides – in delineating the high-end restaurant segment (Warde, 2009; Lane, 2010, 2011). Analyses conducted on a meso-level, on the other hand, emphasize the importance of collective practices and reflexive capacities of actors in understanding processes of taste-making (Hennion, 2004, 2007).

In her book *Accounting for Taste*, the sociologist Priscilla Ferguson (1998) proposes a new mediator in the social construction of taste, one that remains underexplored in contemporary analysis of haute cuisine: the development and dissemination of culinary discourses. Her studies of gastronomy in 19th century France find that culinary discourses that proliferated during this period – which include the voluminous treatises of Carême and later Escoffier, the gastronomic journalism of Grimod de la Reynière, the proto-sociological essays of Brillat-Savarin, the novels of Balzac – played a key role in the construction of a gastronomic field with a particular French character. In her account, Ferguson argues that the formalization of a discourse into written texts made it possible to turn *culinary products* (such as food or taste, which are material and ephemeral in nature) into *intellectual products* that could be removed from their immediate context of use and are durable in time. In this sense, culinary texts were critical in the consolidation of a modern gastronomic field as they allow locating culinary products within a network of stable intellectual discourse from which new and second-order interpretations could arise (Ferguson, 1998, 2004).

Another study that points at the significance of gastronomic texts in shaping haute cuisine is Rao et al.'s (2003) analysis of

(footnote continued)

coveted list is organized by *Restaurant Magazine* and ranks restaurants around the world based on the judgment of 800 international leaders in the culinary industry. Nominations are made for restaurants and not for restaurateurs or chefs. Source: <http://www.theworlds50best.com/>.

⁴Examples of renowned chefs who have been apprentices at elBulli or members of elBulli's brigade are: Joan Roca (restaurant “Celler de Can Roca” in Girona, Spain), René Redzepi (“Noma” in Copenhagen, Denmark), Andoni Luis Aduriz (“Mugaritz” in Guipúzcoa, Spain), Grant Achatz (“Alinea” in Chicago, USA) and Máximo Bottura (“Osteria Francescana” in Modena, Italy), among others.

the formation and consolidation of the *nouvelle cuisine* movement in France, from 1970 to 1997. According to the authors, the theorization conducted by culinary journalists – in the form of articles and reviews – contributed to make new logics and practices that characterized the *nouvelle cuisine* movement understandable and accessible and, in so doing, encouraged the gradual abandonment of elite chefs from classical cuisine.

I build on the findings presented by [Ferguson \(1998, 2004\)](#) and [Rao et.al \(2003\)](#) to explore the significance of the formalization and circulation of a discourse in the case of elBulli restaurant and its impact in the contemporary gastronomic field in general and in particular within high-end restaurant industry.

Research methods and data collection

My analysis is based on ethnographic data collected in two different yet interconnected sites; Spain and the United States, mainly in Barcelona and New York, considered culinary hubs in each site. The research methods that I used included content analysis of public culinary events and existing documentation published by elBulli and about elBulli. The core of the analysis is based on sixty in-depth interviews conducted with culinary professionals. Given that the culinary field is in itself multi-disciplinary, the interviews that I collected comprised a wide variety of participants of the contemporary fine-dining industry, connected and unconnected to elBulli. Participants in the interviewees included: chefs, faculty members of culinary institutes, former apprentices of elBulli most of whom were chefs at renowned restaurants at the moment of the study, and food scholars in fields ranging from chemistry to history and food studies.⁵ The quotes presented in this paper are excerpts of general patterns found in the data across settings, professions and proximity to elBulli of the subjects that participating in the study. The information was gathered over a period of 12 months, from 2011 to 2012.

Consistent with the ethnographic nature of my research, the evidence presented here is necessarily bounded to the settings in which I conducted my field work and limited only to the case under study: elBulli restaurant. Accordingly, my analysis does not attempt to be representative of a general population or to formulate exhaustive cross-case comparisons, for instance, with other important agents in the contemporary gastronomic avant-garde such as Fat Duck or Arzak. Instead, the major goal of this study is to outline one of the key findings that emerged from the data and, in doing so, hopefully contribute to expanding existing knowledge of how innovation is produced and mobilized within the gastronomic field.

Driving innovation in contemporary haute cuisine

Before its closure in July 2011, the press described elBulli as “the most influential restaurant in the world” (The New York

Times, 14th July, 2011). A year earlier, Ferran Adrià was declared “Chef of the Decade” by *Restaurant Magazine*, a coveted ranking-system in the culinary industry. Several factors can be identified in explaining this restaurant and its leader's influence in the high-end restaurant segment. The most relevant factors identified by my interviewees were: (i) the distinctive character of elBulli's style of cooking; (ii) the restaurant's exclusive system of reservations; (iii) the large number of culinary professionals who have been trained at elBulli and disseminated the restaurant's knowledge throughout the world; (iv) the restaurant's exotic location; (v) the various awards given to elBulli and Adrià by prestigious institutions inside and outside of the culinary industry and, finally, (vi) the constant and penetrating exposure of elBulli restaurant and, most notably, of Adrià in the mass media and the press. [Table 1](#) presents examples of quotes obtained from in-depth interviews that describe the significance of each factor.

Elsewhere, I have examined in detail the relative importance of each of these factors and their combined effects on the evolution of elBulli and its ability to produce innovation ([Opazo, forthcoming](#)). In this paper in particular, I focus on examining one factor that appeared to play a significant role in explaining this restaurant's capacity to drive innovation within its field: the culinary discourse elaborated by Adrià and his team that institutionalized innovation beyond this restaurant.

Formalization and diffusion of elBulli restaurant's culinary discourse

Crucial to spreading the influence of elBulli restaurant and Adrià in contemporary haute cuisine are the documentation and publishing of the organization's culinary innovations into written texts and audiovisual material. Building on [Ferguson's](#) model ([Ferguson, 1998, 2004](#)) outlined above, I propose that Adrià and his team undertook the work initiated by its predecessors in the 19th century (especially of Carême and Escoffier) of turning culinary products into intellectual products by methodically documenting the restaurant's knowledge and accomplishments. In doing so, Adrià and his team triggered changes in the existing network of culinary discourses that contributed to consolidate a new and “experimental” culinary movement.

In the late 1990s, elBulli's members embarked on a task that would be decisive in the diffusion of their distinctive culinary approach: cataloging all the dishes and recipes developed throughout the restaurant's life. We can think of these recipes as a restaurant's most apparent innovations, and these have been carefully cataloged by elBulli ever since Adrià joined the restaurant in 1983. Following Adrià's lead, from 1999 onwards, great efforts were devoted to the recollection, integration and systematization of the vast amounts of information generated at organization that addressed not only staff members of elBulli (occupying positions in the kitchen, service and administration) but also potentially interested third-parties outside the restaurant such as other chefs, gastronomic critics, culinary schools and the general public. The completion of this task resulted in a complex system of documentation that articulated the restaurant's

⁵Interviews were conducted in English or in Spanish, according to the subjects' preferences. All quotes in Spanish have been translated by the author.

Table 1

Factors that contribute to explain the influence of elBulli restaurant in the high-end restaurant industry.

Factors	Examples ^(a)
Distinctive style of cooking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I think Ferran [Adrià] was legitimately doing new, cutting-edge and innovative things. And that captured the imagination both for us and, most importantly, of colleagues throughout the world. (Faculty member of a culinary Institute, USA, 2012, unconnected to elBulli). ● It has to do with Ferran's search for offering something new and not replicating what others were already doing. Not having fear of failure or fear of doing something different. This fearlessness, coupled with the quest to do things well and strive for perfection, allowed elBulli to attain the status it has today. (Apprentice at elBulli, 2012).
Exclusivity of the restaurant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● They're open six months during the year, so there'll be open like 100 days or 135 days only. It makes you feel that you need to go there before they close again!...When there is a sale at the store and the store is open only for one day; everyone will feel that they need to go. (Apprentice at elBulli restaurant, 2012). ● So few people got to eat there in reality [...] If they had left it [the restaurant] open lunch and dinner seven days a week, I don't know if they would have been able to keep up with the hype (Chef, USA, 2012, unconnected to elBulli).
Location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● [...] the location was very unique. A mean two hours away from Barcelona in a very small village on the sea in Costa Brava and the Cala Montjoi; such a beautiful place in the mountains that was so quiet and peaceful. Just to drive there, just the excitements of the drive [...], up the hill, up mountains and down, descending to elBulli is, is very celebrating and beautiful. So that itself is an attraction. Then you get to this temple of gastronomy. It is completely different from everything you have ever seen in your life. (Chef and owner of restaurant, USA, 2012).
Apprentices or 'Stagiaires'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● It immediately comes to mind just the people who have been in that kitchen and then go to do their own thing: the sheer numbers. (Faculty member of a culinary Institute, USA, 2012, unconnected to elBulli). ● There are many techniques that people don't know and that will become known with the passage of time. The same 'Bullians' that are travelling around the world will introduce these things. (Apprentice at elBulli restaurant, 2011).
Prizes and awards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● You need to have the reputation, based on Michelin stars or whatever it is, of just being on a different level [...] because you have to play by certain rules. (Apprentice elBulli restaurant, 2012). ● I think they were doing things differently before, but once they had the three stars it may have emboldened them. (Chef and owner of restaurant, USA, 2012, unconnected to elBulli).
Media and press	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I think the change in media helped because it flattened the world in terms of...like the idea of a chef becoming a world-wide phenomenon in the way that it is now, is impossible [...] To me the communication helped to transformed them from what could have been isolated to sort of an epidemic. (Apprentice at elBulli restaurant, 2012). ● The more controversial you are, the more famous you get, that's my opinion. I think controversy draws fame. (Apprentice at elBulli restaurant, 2011). ● ...like in 2001, 2002, The New York Times wrote an article about it [elBulli]. And if you have the New York Times to write an article about you, everyone else is gonna write an article about you. And that makes it kind of snowball, that is how the press happens...After that big article in the Sunday Times, everyone was talking about it [elBulli] in New York. (Chef, USA, 2012, unconnected to elBulli).

Note ^(a): Selected quotes obtained from 60 in-depth interviews with relevant actors of the contemporary gastronomic industry, collected from 2011 to 2012.

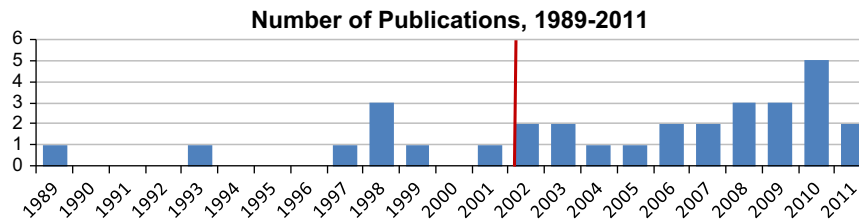
knowledge and practices in written and audiovisual records. Internally, this system of documentation had significant repercussions to the processes of interactions within the organization as it offered a platform for common understanding and coordination (Opazo, *forthcoming*).

Most importantly for the purposes of this study, from 2002 on, Adrià and his team started publishing all the information collected in the form of "general catalogs"⁶ and also in written texts and audiovisual material of several kinds. Overall, this set of publications offers a comprehensive description of every creation developed by elBulli restaurant, classified by content (i.e., products, techniques, concepts, technologies and styles) and date of elaboration. elBulli's general catalogs comprehend detailed explanations of recipes accompanied by engaging pictures that show the final presentation of dishes. These catalogs also come with a CD of explanatory information of

the system of classifications and preparations. The content made available by elBulli restaurant is not confined to culinary products; it also incorporates methodical accounts of the organization's mission, philosophy and internal functioning, such as detailed "evolutionary maps" of recipes and descriptions of the methods of creativity used at the restaurant (Adrià et al., 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006). Although written texts explaining elBulli restaurant's work, specifically Adrià's work, had been published earlier, not until 2002 did the organization systematically integrate and stress the formalization and publication of information, creating its own publishing house called "ElBulli books"⁷, a branch that became responsible for the production and distribution of the organization's publications. By 2003 elBulli's publications began to be translated to several languages,

⁶elBulli's general catalogs range in price from 75 to 140 Euros or 100 to 185 USD (<https://secure.elbulli.com/elbullibooks/>).

⁷It is relevant to note that elBulli's publishing house was named after the restaurant's name and not after the restaurateur or chef's name, Ferran Adrià, which emphasizes the organization's efforts on documenting and publishing.



Graph 1. Publications of elBulli restaurant 1989–2011. Note: Number of publications of elBulli restaurant's work from 1989–2011, including catalogs, books and videos organized by date of publication. The red line marks the year in which elBulli restaurant began to systematically publish its work through different sources (namely, from 2002 onwards). All books published by elBulli before 1999 are sold out (<https://secure.elbulli.com/elbullibooks/>).

from the expected English, French and Italian to the perhaps more surprising Japanese and German (Graph 1).

My interviewees, both in Spain and in the United States, consistently pointed out that the early diffusion of elBulli's discourse in the form of written texts happened at a time when Smartphones and social media (e.g., Twitter, Facebook and others) were not as prevalent in gastronomic restaurants as they are now, which bolstered the impact of elBulli's documentations in spreading the organization's distinctive philosophy and knowledge.

.... This is before the time of Twitter, you know? elBulli finished before that became a reality. Nobody was twitting dishes...people didn't have their cell phones to take pictures [at restaurants]. (Apprentice at elBulli restaurant, 2012)

While publishing cookbooks is a common practice among modern high-end cuisine restaurants, the exhaustive and methodical publication of every creation developed within a restaurant was something specific to elBulli by the early 2000s. One indicator of its standing in the contemporary gastronomic field can be found in the comprehensive overview of culinary techniques and preparations published by Myhrvold et al. (2011) for which Ferran Adrià wrote one of the Forewords. Interestingly, this collection of books was published the same year the elBulli restaurant closed its doors, to start its reinvention into a new foundation of creativity.

I propose that the formalization and distribution of a discourse performed by elBulli provided a definite background of knowledge that allowed other culinary professionals to recognize the value of elBulli's innovations, irrespective of their personal approach or preferences to cooking. In doing so, elBulli's documentations fostered the emergence of a "community of discourse" composed by culinary professionals interested in reproducing as well as extending elBulli's culinary language. Different to "speech communities" which are sustained by verbal language, a "discourse community" is held together by a written language, by words. A common textual base allows knowledge to detach from the specific circumstances of its participants (e.g., geographic location and customs). Once separated from its social origins, therefore, texts allow the group to focus on developing a shared goal (Swales, 1990). In this regard, I suggest that the systematic documentation and circulation of elBulli restaurant's discourse was instrumental in the construction and expansion of the

avant-garde movement that has revolutionized the culinary field. In a similar way as the nouvelle cuisine movement in the 1970s gradually challenged the conventions imposed by classical cuisine (Rao et al., 2003), in the early 2000s, elBulli became one of the motors behind the emergence and subsequent institution of a new culinary movement in haute cuisine.

Three functions of discourse in institutionalizing culinary innovation

Drawing on in-depth interviews, it was possible to identify three main functions that elBulli's discourse played in spreading and legitimating new knowledge and ideas within its field: first, conceptualizing innovations; second, socializing innovations and; third, controlling innovations. I propose that these functions can also apply to and illuminate the role of discourse in other industries or organizations primarily concerned with the development of innovation.

Conceptualizing innovations

As mentioned previously, innovation is not only about having an original idea or implementing an original idea. Innovation also means getting new ideas *recognized* within a given community of people (Van de Ven, 1986). Such recognition depends critically on positioning novel ideas within a given social and cultural context. Whence Adrià's stress on the social significance of formalization:

...Because in the end, everything exists already...So it is a matter of seeing it and conceptualizing it. [One could say that] until 1998 hot jellies did not exist [an innovation incorporated by elBulli in haute cuisine] – this is not true! You could find it [hot jellies] in Chinese cuisine! The fact that in the year 98 the first hot jelly appeared in [culinary] history is because we conceptualized it. (Ferran Adrià, public talk given at the "Food and Wine Festival", New York, October 2011).

Former members of elBulli's brigade de cuisine and apprentices also recognize the importance that the elBulli's discourse had on organizational growth and, most notably, in escalating Adrià's visibility in the gastronomic field.

You cannot discount the fact that they [elBulli's members] were compulsive in their documentation, but more

importantly they were compulsive in their distribution of data. (Apprentice at elBulli restaurant, 2012).

If you look at the influence that Ferran's cooking has had in the world, you realize that it is huge. Because I have been in South America and I have seen other cooks and restaurants that are clearly influenced by elBulli. The work that has been done with recipes' documentation at a conceptual level is well done and has had great success, due to this, I think a cook knows Ferran Adrià. (Former member of elBulli restaurant, Barcelona, 2011).

A former apprentice of elBulli whose culinary approach he himself regarded as largely divergent from Adrià's, described how elBulli's materials had made large amount of content available far beyond the restaurant's immediate environment:

I mean, we have access to every book for the past 20 years and everyone has the CD. And in the CD is possible to navigate very well. All his books have the CD. All the recipes don't work but, everybody has access to it. (Chef, New York City, 2012, unconnected to elBulli).

To the extent that documents contribute to the stabilization of a novel discourse within a network of pre-existing discourses, they trigger changes in the network of interactions among the participants in that field. Similarly, by systematizing and disseminating their work, Adrià and elBulli position themselves on the culinary map of the 21st century:

[elBulli] had a way of owning their content...if you look back maybe French restaurants, years and years ago, you wouldn't see people so much publicizing all their knowledge. elBulli, I think, they were so intelligent on how they knocked their information out [...] For me this was such an important part of elBulli's experience. It was not only about the cooking, it was to learn about media. They knew so much about documenting, about content. I really think they were way ahead of the curve in knowing what is good content, and having content keeps people captivated... That's why I think they were brilliant. (Apprentice elBulli restaurant, 2012).

Socializing innovations

Previous studies on elBulli restaurant have highlighted Adrià's personal talent for building networks and disseminating innovative ideas (Svejenova, 2005; Svejenova et al., 2007). Documents (written texts, photographs and videos) transmit an innovative discourse outside the boundaries of an organization in orderly ways. In doing so, documentation provides an effective medium for "rallying allies," an act that is decisive for legitimating fresh ideas within a given community (Latour, 1986, 1987). As suggested by interviewees, shortly after their publication, elBulli's material began to be circulated through other channels (e.g. the web) and used by culinary professionals in diverse ways: for teaching purposes, to prepare for an internship at elBulli or at other experimental-cuisine restaurants or, simply, to gain familiarity with elBulli's

culinary approach or to decide whether to apply or not specific techniques and concepts in the chef's own work. For these many reasons, culinary professionals connected and unconnected to elBulli fostered the development of elBulli's discourse into new and unexpected directions.

What I am doing a lot now is teaching. A lot of people, even though they have access [to elBulli's material], they don't know where to look...[Students] may have seen these techniques but not necessarily seen somebody do them first-hand. In 2003, when the very very first [specific recipes published in books] were coming out, I didn't know where to find the ingredients and when I did find them they were too old or not the right ones, or they just didn't work for me. So sometimes you need someone to show you how to do it... (Chef, USA, 2012, unconnected to elBulli).

When I first saw Albert Adrià's book [book written in 2008 by the avant-garde pastry chef brother of Ferran Adrià], I thought: 'I could take so much away from this and apply it to what I do'. I mean, just pure presentation-wise. And that shifted [my work]. (Chef, USA, 2012, unconnected to elBulli).

Before going to elBulli [as an apprentice] I had already studied the books. Great parts of what they did, I had already learned on my own. In fact, with my fellow stagiaires we had a game of naming a dish or a recipe [of elBulli] and others had to guess from which year it was. That tells you that the rest had seen the catalogs of elBulli too. (Apprentice at elBulli restaurant, 2011).

Controlling content of innovations

While the formalization of a restaurant's innovations into written texts also allows the sharing of innovations, it also facilitates control of content. Controlling the content of novel ideas is especially critical for creative industries where "patents" do not exist. This is the case of gastronomy (Aguilera, 2012) and also of other creative industries such as fashion (Mears, 2011) or the open-source software industry (Benkler, 2006), where products are similarly elusive.⁸ Thus, in assigning "property rights" to discoveries, the socialization of knowledge through formal publications functions similarly to a patent for an invention. In these contexts, publications allows innovators to attach their inventions to an identifiable source and to specify the way in which they want their discoveries to be transmitted, thereby shaping the content and presentation of their creations.

They [elBulli's team] are very smart, very smart! Because in a game that's about who can get it out there first, they have been very aggressive about making sure that their materials are out there and accessible. (Chef, USA, 2012, unconnected to elBulli).

⁸For further information on parallels between the industries of "haute cuisine" and "haute couture" see Johanna Blakely's work at <http://johanna-blakely.wordpress.com/2011/10/25/haute-couture-haute-cuisine/>.

In this line, several culinary professionals, both in Spain and the United States, pointed out Adrià's ego and how his desire to cultivate a legacy explains elBulli's systematic efforts of diffusion:

The concept of documenting every single thing that you do, and cataloging, and then sharing it, I realize that is not only altruism necessarily, but he [Ferran Adrià] does want to make sure that, for the people who do follow, that there is a definitive document. There is no guessing. He does take control about it. He has opened it up to everyone but he controls the ways in which it is presented. (Chef, New York City, 2012, unconnected to elBulli).

In the same way that I control my Twitter feed...In the same way that they [elBulli's members] control the content that goes out. (Apprentice at elBulli restaurant, 2012).

At the end, all this has to do with ego too. Ferran [Adrià] wants to create his brand, he wants elBulli and Ferran Adrià to exist for 20 years more, after he dies, and for this he needs to leave proof. So they have shared all the information of what they have done, but at the same time they're saying: 'this was made by elBulli, this was made by Ferran Adrià. (Apprentice at elBulli restaurant, 2011).

Importantly, as Adrià has mentioned on several occasions, although innovators may control what they do and the way in which their discoveries are presented to others, they cannot control the consequences of what they do, especially with the rise of Internet and social media (public talk given at Business School, Columbia University, New York, October 2011). Yet, elBulli restaurant closed just at a time when the mass use of these technologies became a reality.

Lastly, while accounting for the significance of documentations might lead us to think of the gastronomic field as a collection of narratives that sustain praxis, it is important to bear in mind that cuisine is ultimately a performative art (Ferguson, 1998). For this reason, the craft of cooking cannot be fully detached either from the material and transient nature of food or from the systematic study of food. Hence, in the context of gastronomy, the use of documentation as a way to get new ideas recognized appears to be more effective when accompanied by a deep understanding of the basis of knowledge that supports the culinary field.⁹ My interviewees suggest that this dynamic also applies in the development of other crafts such as music or painting.

Great practitioners throughout history – and it doesn't matter what discipline – are grounded in the classic traditions in history of whatever it is...In music: you tend to learn the classical approaches to things when you are

learning how to play an instrument. Or painting: Picasso was an expert at pencil and paper drawing and realistic renderings of objects before he could really delve into cubism. And I think that same is true now.

During the nouvelle cuisine movement, it became clear who were the chefs grounded in classic fundamentals and who weren't, and the same is true with modernist cuisine or avant-garde cooking, whatever you want to call what Ferran [Adrià] has been a driver of. There are practitioners out there who are doing all these kinds of neat stuff, and it is not good, because they don't have that basis of understanding, they don't have that depth of knowledge that allows Ferran to be great. (Faculty member at a culinary school, USA, 2012, unconnected to elBulli)

In the case of elBulli restaurant, the organization's members and in particular its leader, Adrià, started their professional career by mastering classical approaches of French cuisine as a basis to propose new ways of doing things. elBulli members' in-depth knowledge in the classics is manifested in several culinary prizes and awards that were given to the restaurant during its initial stages by reputed gastronomic institutions, such as the nomination of the celebrated French Chef Joël Robuchon of Adrià as his "heir" on a public television station, a rating of 19/20 given by the guide Gault and Millau in 1995, or a third-Michelin star awarded to the restaurant in 1997. In effect, Adrià and his team's departure from preexisting knowledge and conventions as a basis to moving beyond those conventions was seen as a basic aspect of the restaurant's ability to drive innovation within its field:

Ferran is a master of the classics foremost, and then he sat down in the creative role. He knows how to use salt first before anything else and that is what a lot of people forget these days. It is the importance of knowing the classics and the basics. (Chef, USA, 2012, unconnected to elBulli).

You need to be a great chef to make these new ingredients properly shine. You need to understand how to draw flavors and bring flavors unto the pedestal that you want to. And then, have fun with these newer ingredients in our pantry where we can now probably manipulate into textures and shapes that we weren't able to do before...they [elBulli's team] were in the right situation. (Chef, USA, 2012, unconnected to elBulli)

In sum, formalizing and publishing leveraged elBulli restaurant's ability to spread its discoveries and to institutionalize a distinctive discourse within preexisting discourses in the fine-dining industry. Moreover, the diffusion of elBulli's innovations was ever more effective due to Adrià and his team knowledge in the classics of gastronomy, which had been previously recognized by prestigious actors and institutions in the culinary industry.

In a recent talk, Adrià pointed out that "cuisine is a language that everyone speaks and understands" (public talk given at Google company headquarters, USA, October, 2011). Like every language, however, the culinary language proposed by

⁹The gastronomic magazine "Lucky Peach" (2012) published an interesting article consisting of an informal conversation between the known chefs David Chang ("Momofuku", New York, USA), Claude Bosi ("Hibiscus", London, UK), Sat Bains ("Sat Bains", Nottingham, UK) and Daniel Patterson (Coi, San Francisco, USA) regarding issues of property in the culinary world rights, the influence of Ferran Adrià and the importance of knowing the classics in gastronomy.

elBulli is in constant evolution and, as such, it opened up new possibilities for culinary professionals to undertake and expand, thereby, challenging the standards of conformity and nonconformity that had long shaped the gastronomic field.

Conclusion

By using elBulli restaurant as case study, I have looked at a key and heretofore largely unrecognized driver of innovation in haute cuisine: the systematic use of documentation for cataloging, socializing and controlling the content of a restaurant or restaurateurs' creations. My analysis suggests that important aspects of the spread and influence of innovations might be overlooked if we do not account for role that discourses play in the rendering new ideas accessible and mobile to other participants in a given field. I conclude that the formalization and circulation of a discourse has the potential to raise the capacity of an innovator (i. e., an individual or an organization) to get new ideas recognized within its field, a capacity that is all the more important in industries like gastronomy, where ultimate products such as dishes or recipes are elusive in nature.

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